(c) In order to prevent unmanned level crossing accidents, public awareness programmes and publicity campaings are undertaken regularly for educating road users for observing safe practices while negotiating unmanned level crossings. Joint ambush checks with the involvement of civil authorities are also conducted. Level crossings, on reaching the laid down traffic volume criteria of manning, are also progressively manned. As a special measure to reduce the number of level crossings, Zonal Railways have been given power to consider and sanction'Limited Use Subways' wherever technically feasible. Efforts are also being made to close down as many of unmanned level crossings as possible, suggesting their merger with another level crossing in the close vicinity.

Observation by Pakistani Minister regarding melting of Glaciers

*531. DR. ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the observations made by Pakistan's Minister for Environment, on the sidelines of Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, 2007 held during 4th week of January, 2007, that "India should focus on the environmental aspects of Siachen Glaciers which are melting at a faster rate due to global warming and continuous human traffic owing to heavy development of troops;

(b) if so, what is the reaction of Government keeping the security of the nation in view,towards the suggestion of Pakistan's Minister; and

(c) whether a comparative study has been made of other similar glaciers regarding the magnitude of melting rate where there is no human traffic?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. However, as per the information made available by the Geological Survey of India, the total retreat of Siachen Glacier during the last 95 years (1909-2004) is about 500 meters at an average annual rate of 5.3 meter per year only.Thus the observations made by the Pakistani Minister are not based on the factual data.Moreover, no proposal has been received by the

Government of India from Government of Pakistan regarding environmental aspects of Siachen Glaciers, although media reports from Pakistan occasionally refer to the environmental benefits of the demilitarisation of the area. Also, in proportion to the vastness of the Siachen Glacier, the actual deployment of the troops is small, which can have negligible effect on its melting.

(c) Geological Survey of India has also undertaken studies on recession of several Himalayan glaciers, including Siachen Glacier. These studies revealed that the majority of glaciers of Himalayan region are passing through a phase of recession, as has been the case with the glaciers located in other parts of the world. The rate of recession in Himalayan region in different climatic zones is found to be variable in different years. This variable rate of recession can be attributed to the several climatic factors.

Special Agricultural Zones

*532. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN:
SHRI SANJAY RAUT:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to set up Special Agricultural Zones;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (c) There is no proposal under consideration in the Ministry of Agriculture to set up Special Agriculture Zones.

Environmental clearance to hydel power plant in Kerala

*533. SHRI K.E. ISMAIL: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that his Ministry had sent a team to examine the objections raised by certain quarters against the proposed 163 MW hydel power projects at the Athirapally Waterfalls in Kerala;